

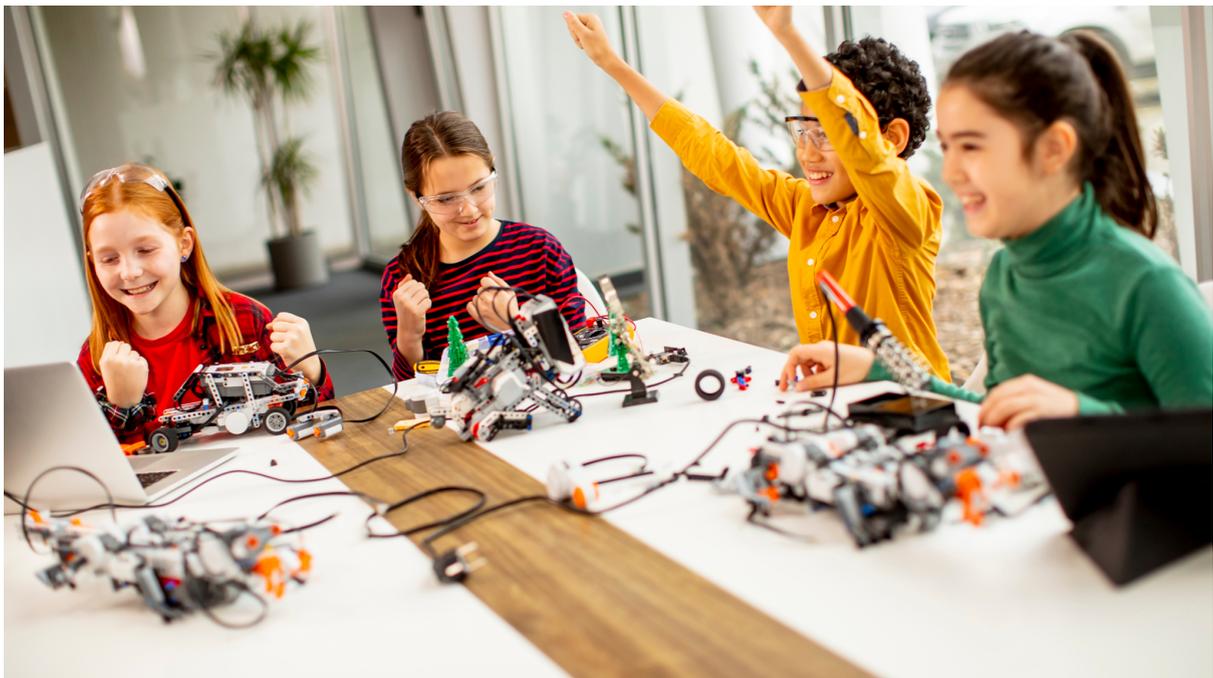


21st Century Learning

Overview

We will come right out and say that “21st century learning” is really a big collection of different ideas, which mean different things to different people. There are, however, general agreements on the way our society and way of working is changing, the challenges that might be ahead of us for the next 100 years, and the skills we are likely to need to confront them and to thrive as both community and individual.

We want to explore what it all means to us, and to the way we serve our learners. The way we learn, the world of work ahead of us, the way we evidence learning and experience, and the structures and approaches that support us to build vital skill sets for an uncertain future; all of this is here to be explored.



In this Article

- Why do we need 21st century learning? What is changing?
- What exactly is 21st century learning?
- How to support a 21st century approach to learning
- How does 21st century learning happen at Learnlife?



Why do we need 21st century learning?

The most straightforward way to evidence this is to ask you a question. Do you think the world is becoming more complex and uncertain?

Just a generation or two ago, things were more linear. The world economy was developing at a pace we could follow, with new products and services rolled out that we could understand and digest. Many people trained for a career that was already familiar to them (and their parents), and the majority worked with one or two companies their whole life.

It wasn't easier. Those in Europe and North America worked longer hours. Fewer people worked part time, and work-related stress seems to have been just as high in the 1950's and 60's as it is today. Diversity and inclusion, well-being, values-driven cultures and all the rest of it were just not part of the equation.

Yes, life was not any easier back then, but it was more *predictable*. The world of "[scientific management](#)" and production line scalability. We could see ahead with reasonable clarity and plan our educational approaches to equip learners for that future. That world is gone.

The VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world of today demands far more of us. Climate breakdown is happening, and all of the related [social and economic impacts](#) that will bring. Technology is changing so fast that more and more of us are being left behind, unable to keep pace with new frontiers such as AI and the metaverse.

The world of work is changing, with more entrepreneurship, remote working, project-hopping, reskilling and adapting to change. Learners no longer need to acquire degrees and masters as the "golden ticket" to employment, and there are so many new pathways out there to learning, and new ways to demonstrate that learning to employers.

And we want more. More from life, more of a balance, more purpose in what we do, and more of a contribution to an economic model that does not take more than it can pay back. More than sustainability, we want an *equitable, regenerated, revitalised* world where we can all feel included and part of something bigger.

That means learning has to change too.

What exactly is 21st century learning?

Traditional learning goes like this: we learn in lockstep groups, in a classroom, facing a teacher, who delivers content to us as we sit, listen and take notes. The learning content is mainly geared towards basic skills such as numeracy and literacy, and then adding a bit of culture (history, social studies), some competitive sport, and things that will help us get a job.

We can choose a few options from a predetermined menu of subjects, we sit exams in those and get a number or a letter which defines how good we are at it. Subjects are



learned separately and do not mix. We transition directly from the classroom to employment, and are then told to “forget everything” we learned because now we are in the “real world”.

Sorry. It is hard to write about such an approach without our obviously scathing view of it coming through. The thing is, though this way of learning never did serve us in terms of our capacity to be creative, adaptable and curious lifelong learners, it did make a *little* more sense in a world where we could see what lay ahead.

21st century learning is where we embrace the fact that learning happens anywhere, at any time in any place. Online, offline, with friends, alone at the laptop, with a learning guide, in the forest... anywhere. We do not all have to be in the same place when a bell rings, and we don't need a bell at all for that matter.

We discover our passions and our sense of purpose, learning the things that spark joy and motivation, and we do that on our own terms. We do not face a teacher, but rather take responsibility for our own learning, with the Learning Guide to accompany us. The educator moves from *source* to *resource* as we build our own pathways and discover new things about ourselves and each other.

The focus is on critical skills, not isolated facts. We do not memorise and regurgitate, but develop skills such as intercultural awareness, self-reflection and critical thinking. We learn to be entrepreneurs and to work with others. We learn what value and values mean to us, and [we do not separate knowledge into “subjects”](#) because that is not how the world works. Everything in this world is connected, and that is therefore how we should learn.

We do not aim for grades of numbers or letters to demonstrate mastery of knowledge, but rather portfolios and products, reflective pieces and discussions; learning to embrace the setbacks as valuable experiences in our journey.

We do not learn information in the siloes of “subjects” but in a cross-disciplinary way. We learn digital skills at the same time as we develop our understanding of what digital citizenship is. We learn critical thinking to develop resilience to information overload in a virtual world. These things do not exist in isolation, to be boxes ticked one-by-one on a list.

That is the real world. Where would you rather be at 16 years old? Standing with a list of grades and no idea who you are or what you might be capable of, or standing there with the skills and passion to navigate yourself in a purposeful direction and adapt to the world ahead?

Because that is the crux of it. 21st century learning is fluid, as we must be equipped to adapt and move with the world as it gathers pace and shifts direction. We must know who we are, what we can do, how to learn effectively, and how to navigate complexity. Traditional education cannot deliver that.



How does 21st century learning happen at Learnlife?

We cannot meet the challenges of the 21st century with a 19th century approach. At Learnlife, you will find that this has meant really deconstructing the whole idea of “school” and building something different, piece by piece, as a community of learners.

Back in the early days of “[factory schools](#)”, children started the day early because their parents needed to be on the production line. The experiences of children and adults in that model were reflective of each other, with both moving through a highly structured day, moving in lockstep towards predetermined outputs and outcomes. Obedience, attention, uniformity.

At Learnlife, things could not be more different.

We believe that learning can and does happen anywhere, any time in any place. Some learners join us full time, while some come to us one or two days a week as an add-on to learning elsewhere.

Some join us in our Urban Hub, Eco Hub, from home (the “Home Hub”), or any combination that suits them best. The modern family is not a production line unit, and deserves the fluidity and flexibility that works for them. Learners develop time management and self-regulation skills much earlier in this more open approach, and we see this time and again.

So what does that all mean for the learning itself? Well firstly, we take it out of the “classroom”, so that learners can direct their own learning in a range of environments and situations. They learn in nature, with friends, on their own, through research, with a Learning Guide, in a studio or in a workplace.

21st century learning is lifelong learning, where we do not help children to learn only in a siloed environment they will be in for the first years of their lives. True learning recognises no such boundaries. Experiential immersion in a range of learning contexts is the way we really recognise and internalise the rich learning opportunities that life presents us.

And what about those 21st century skills we hear so much about? They can only flourish where the learner is autonomous. At Learnlife, the learning pathways are built around the learner themselves. They are in control, and our Learning Guides are there to support, but not to lead.

Through such autonomy, a learner is more likely to find their *ikigai*; their sense of passion, purpose and direction. In the studios, they tinker and iterate with creativity. In 360 degree feedback they learn to adapt and to evolve through learning to embrace setbacks and to reflect not only on what they learned, but how they learned and who they are becoming.



In Summary...

We all know the world ahead will not be easy. With such inequality, polarisation and rapid change, the challenges are myriad. To this, the traditional model of education offers a singular approach which cannot possibly work. The skills we need, the knowledge of self, the values we have internalised through experience and reflection; all of this need not be left to chance, in the world *outside* a classroom designed for an age which has already passed.

“21st century learning” is a buzzword, used so often without attention to the substance of real and meaningful change. 21st century learning is not a workshop on creativity, or an add-on to the fixed curriculum of mainstream education. If we truly unpack what it means, it comes down to change. Allowing learners space and agency to develop the skills they need for *their* future is at the heart of everything we do at Learnlife. This is natural learning, the way we are hardwired to do, and not the memorization of facts and repetition of ideas that suited the learning environments of a rapidly industrialising society.

21st century learning sounds futuristic, but really, it means going back to how things should have been all along.

Our Blogs on 21st century Learning

- ['It's time for the little boats': The Future of Learning](#)
- [The Future of Learning: Preparing Learners for a Future We Cannot Control](#)
- [It's Time to Champion Microcredentialing](#)
- [What does VUCA learning look like?](#)
- [\[RE\]LEARN 2020: The Future of Learning](#)
- [How the role of an educator must change to suit the 21st century](#)

Our Programmes

- [Primary Programmes](#)
- [Secondary Programmes](#)
- [Home Hub](#)
- [Community Programmes](#)

Elements of the Learning Paradigm

- [Element 10: Diversifying Learning Methodologies](#)
- [Element 11: Competency-Based Learning](#)



Sources

- [\[PDF\] The rise and fall of the factory system: technology, firms, and households since the industrial revolution A comment | Semantic Scholar](#)
- [How Do You Define 21st-Century Learning?](#)
- [21st century skills in 20th century classrooms](#)